

October 30, 2011
 Psalm 80:1-19 / John 3:1-18 / II Corinthians 5:11-6:2
 What Does It Mean To Be "Saved"?

In terms of evangelism, and seeking to find out where any given person stands in relation to the Lord, probably one of the most frequently asked questions is: "Are you saved?" By which the person often means: "Are you going to heaven." Although that's really NOT what the word "saved" means.

Going to heaven is one of the many consequences of being saved, as is being forgiven, and justified, and reconciled to God, but it's not really what the word "saved" refers to.

Therefore, as I begin this series of FOUR messages, I thought it would be helpful to start by asking all of you a few questions that have to do with salvation and what salvation means. And please don't answer out loud!

If someone with little or no church background at all were to come up to you (because they respect you and heard you were a Christian) and they were to say to you: *"Some guy I don't know (claiming to be a Christian) came up to me yesterday and asked me if I was "saved." Truthfully, I don't even know what that means. Could you tell me, "What does it MEAN to be 'saved'?"*

If someone asked you that question, what would you tell them? And if they went on to ask, ***"What must I DO to be saved?"*** / Or after that, probed even further and asked, ***"What must I do AFTER I am saved?"*** / And then a year after their conversion came back to you again (after falling into sin and being hammered with a sense of failure and doubt) and asked: ***"How can I KNOW FOR SURE that I am saved?"*** -- what would you tell them?

Because honestly, although most Americans (even of the unbelieving type) may have had a general concept of how to answer those questions just a couple decades, or generations ago, we've come to a point in our society where most people honestly do not know the answers -- even people who've grown up within the confines of the local church.

And since it's extremely important that we know the answers to those questions, my next four messages will address each one, beginning today with the first question: "**What does it MEAN to be saved?**" It's a question I want to explain in detail for TWO very specific reasons:

- 1st)** Because there's always the possibility (even among people who have attended church for years) that there are some present who do not really know what it means to be saved. And therefore, have not sought after salvation, nor come to experience it, because they truly don't know what it is and thus fail to see their desperate need to possess it.
- 2nd)** I share it with you so that YOU -- coming to understand it better -- might be able to pass these things on to others. Because, again, just as hearing a salesman at a store tell you what a product is / and what it does / and why you need to buy it / helps you to determine whether or not you will / SO ALSO (in a similar though not equal sense) knowing what salvation is / and what Christ saves us from / is one of the main means that God uses to awaken and convince people of their need for salvation. He uses the knowledge of what it means to be saved to arouse in lost sinners the desire to seek after it and possess it.

And, before I begin let me say that the best way to view the biblical concept of salvation is to see it somewhat like an onion (I'm serious)! It has many different layers of meaning, and as soon as you peel off one, you see another and then another and then another! In fact, if I were to cover each separate one in depth, we'd be here into the late afternoon!

But I won't do that! Rather, I'll simply cover the FOUR most prominent, core, fundamental answers regarding what salvation is, and leave it up to you (if you should so desire) to grab your concordance and investigate the others.

So, let us begin **FIRST**, with the OT. And when we do, we see that the word "saved" or "salvation" (most commonly using the Hebrew words "nasal" or "yasa") has a much more "temporal" or "earthy" sense to it. Because those words most commonly mean being rescued, delivered, protected or saved by God from danger, disease, calamity, barrenness, sickness, war, conquest by a foreign nation, famine, oppression, injustice, persecution or death.

Thus we read in Ps. 54: **"SAVE me, O God, by the power of your name; rescue me by your might... for strangers are attacking me, and ruthless men seek my life..."** It's salvation from one's enemies. / Or again in Ps. 72: **"He will take pity on the weak and the needy, and SAVE the needy from death. He will rescue them from violence and oppression..."**

MOST of the cries for "salvation" in the OT are centered in the struggles or concerns of this present life. **"Save us from our enemies..." / "Save me from evil and violent men..." / "Save your people, the remnant of Israel; let them not perish from the face of the earth..."**

In the face of possible invasion, it's a cry for God to save at least some of His chosen people from physical death, so that they can carry on the line of David, and pass on the story of redemption.

And though it's not as prominent in the NT, you need to know that aspect of salvation does not totally disappear from the NT. For in the Gospels we find that being saved from death / or being healed from disease or illness / are still included as part of God's gift of salvation (Matt. 8:25 / 14:30 / 27:40-49 / James 5:13-16).

As one scholar writes: **"The word "sozo" (the Greek word for "saved" in the NT) "means to preserve, to keep from harm, to rescue, deliver or save from death and calamity. In classical Greek," he says, "sozo was also used in medical circles and carried with it the idea of being healed in the sense of saving a body from illness or death."** / Which means those whom Christ healed did in a very real sense, taste of one of the many different aspects of God's "salvation."

Which brings us to the **SECOND** the Gospel not only saves us from the penalty of sin or the wrath of God against it, it also saves us from the power of sin and the temporal consequences of it. As Matt. 1:21 tells us (in the Christmas story): **"You shall give Him the name Jesus for He shall save His people from their sins."**

Not from the penalty of their sins (which we just looked at), but from sin itself! When God saves us what He does is break the powerful grasp sin had over our

lives. Or as the Christians of old used to say: He breaks sin's enslaving rule or the dominion sin had over our lives.

"Save me," said David, **"from all my transgressions."** He kept falling into sin, and so he asks God to save him from transgressing again. / Or as we read in Ps. 120: "Save me, O God, from lying and deceitful lips..." Not from the penalty God would eventually mete out against such things, but from the sin of lying. It's like the alcoholic saying: **"Save me from my addiction to the bottle."**

Paul speaks of this aspect of salvation in Rom. 7:14-25. There we read of sin being so sinful (or so powerful -- a law or principle at work within him that's so strong) that it makes him, do what he doesn't want to do, and unable to do what he wants to do!

"When I want to do good, evil is right there with me," he says. **"For in my inner being I delight in God's law, but I see another law at work in my members, waging war against the law of my mind, and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my body."**

And fully aware of this powerful law of sin at work within him, he cries out, **"Oh, what a wretched man that I am! Who will save me from this body of death."** The English word "wretch," used here, comes from the Saxon word "wraecca" which means wreck. **"Oh what a wreck of a person I am. Who will save me from this body of death?"**

And what's the answer? "Thanks be to God who has given us the victory through Jesus Christ our Lord!" Jesus is the One who saves us, not simply from sin's penalty, but also from sin's power over our lives!

I've said this before, but it's fitting here as well: Sin is very much like a huge Boa constrictor that wraps itself around us. According to the Bible it binds and enslaves or imprisons us. It has made everyone in the world its captive or prisoner, according to Paul in Gal. 3:12.

Yet one of the things JESUS came to do through His work of redemption (says Mt. 1:21) is "save us" from the stranglehold of that powerful, constricting snake which binds and holds us prisoner. A snake we call sin.

Therefore, when Jesus saves us, it's like he comes to us and takes a huge knife, and plunges it into that boa constrictor, until it loosens its grip, and eventually, little by little, slinks to the ground where it lays in a heap at our feet. Not completely dead or gone. But dying, and mortally wounded.

And we will continue to trip over it, because the serpent or entity we call sin never totally bleeds out or dies, until we do. But through Jesus (who "saves His people from their sins") we are "saved" from its rule, control, dominion or enslaving power over our lives. In redemption, "**[God] breaks the power of canceled sin,**" as Charles Wesley wrote.

Which brings us to the **THIRD** major sense in which "being saved" is used in the Bible. The sense of being SALVAGED by God. To be saved is to embark in a process of being gradually fixed, mended, healed, made new or restored by God.

Because often times its true: We do make a mess or a wreck out of our lives. Bad decisions, bad choices, inappropriate actions, regrettable responses, poor judgment, lack off wisdom or just plain unthinking foolishness that has no regard for the consequences of our thoughts, words or actions.

And in that sense, we're like a car that been totaled in an accident and is sitting in the junk yard or salvage yard of life waiting to be scrapped. And what God does in salvation is walk into the salvage yard / pick us out of the many wrecks that are there / and begins restoring us! It's the part of "salvation" we call "sanctification."

Like Charlie Shinn or Dave Snyder when they get a hold of a damaged car, God takes us and immediately starts pounding out the dents, and grinding off the rust, and cutting off the sharp and jagged edges of the metal that have been crumpled and twisted by the impact of many "accidents."

He overhauls the engine, reprograms the computer, puts in a new battery, and replaces the wiring harness. He replaces the cracked windshield / applies some body filler in the dents / sands it until its smooth / and then primes and paints it. He may even bake the paint job in the low-temp furnace of affliction (through trials) until the shine is hard and glossy.

Then he puts in new carpet, and new upholstery, and puts on the new tires and gives it an alignment. He restores, sanctifies, purifies, cleanses renews and saves us from the negative consequences or destructive effects sin has had on our lives.

Then we come to the **LAST** meaning of the word "saved" or "salvation" which we find in the Bible. And because this one is the one that is used most commonly in Scripture, I will spend the most time on it, although I need to point out that in our day it is spoken of least of all, because it has to do with "being saved" from God's just and righteous anger or holy wrath against people's sin.

It's salvation from a wrath that is meted out in both the temporal sense of judgments carried out upon certain people or nations in the present / **AND** in the future and eternal sense as on the Day of Judgment, as well as eternally, in hell.

And I know how unpopular it is to speak of salvation as being saved from God's wrath or the torments of hell. But it is what the Bible teaches. In fact, no one in the entire Bible spoke of hell more than Jesus. / Of the 14 times we find the word "hell" used in the Bible, 12 come from the lips of Jesus Himself.

It is Jesus who emphasized as much as anyone else that the gift of salvation included the unspeakable blessing of, "being saved from God's eternal wrath against our sin in hell." And thus, if we are to be true to what our Lord Jesus taught, we cannot skip over this topic -- distasteful as it may be to so many.

In fact, even in the OT the clearly stated Good News of the Gospel was that God, out of His great love for offending sinners, has graciously made a way that people can be saved from the wrath that He, as a Just and Holy God, must exercise against all sin, rebellion and disobedience.

That's why Is. 61:2, which lays out the Gospel that Jesus was both anointed and sent to preach, declares that it would include the proclamation of both: "the year (or the time) of God's favor **AND** the day of the vengeance of our God."

Which means that the Gospel is NOT IN ANY WAY the message that God has now canceled the Day of judgment or relented from holding people accountable for their sins.

Not at all! According to Scripture it's the message that God is so unspeakably gracious that even though He is just and must therefore punish sin, He chose to do that in Christ, the sinner's substitute, thereby making it possible for Him to be both just and the justifier of all who will receive Christ in this present age.

It is not simply favor, but favor offered in light of the coming day of wrath, when His just judgment will be poured out in full measure on ALL who have chosen to reject God's offer of mercy in Christ.

Paul tells us that in II Thess. 1:6-10 where he writes: ***"God is just. He will pay back trouble for trouble to those who trouble you... This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with His powerful angels. He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the Gospel of Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and the majesty of His power."***

That's what the Gospel is: The promise of God's free and gracious favor offered to ALL in light of the fact that He will one day (on the day He calls, "the day of the vengeance of our God") unleash His wrath in all its fury.

As John Benton rightly states: ***"God has ordained two places that all sin will be punished. One is hell. The other is the cross of Jesus Christ. Hell is where finite people suffer eternally the punishment for their own sin. The cross is where the infinite God-man, Jesus Christ, suffered in history for sins which were not his own. He suffered for the sins... of all who in every age would trust in Him."***

That's why Paul, speaking to people who refuse to repent and heed the Gospel, can warn them saying: ***"Because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath against yourselves for the day of wrath, when God's righteous judgment will be revealed"*** (Rom. 2:5).

He says it again in Col. 3:5, where after speaking of things like, "**sexual immorality, lust, evil desires and greed,**" he warns them: "**Because of such things as these, the wrath of God is coming.**"

That's his warning to every person. A warning that has nearly disappeared from the message many churches now preach -- and with it the essence of the Good News we are called to proclaim.

Because whether we like it or not (and multitudes do not) salvation is primarily being saved from God's wrath against our sin. It's a salvation so precious that you can sense the note of gratitude and joy in Paul's words when he says in Rom. 5:9: "**Since we have now been justified by His blood, how much more shall we be saved from the wrath of God through Him!**"

So, when people ask, "What does it mean to be saved?" the answer (if it is to be in any way biblical) must at least include being "saved" from God's wrath.

That's what Paul told the Thessalonians when he encouraged them (and us as well) to: "**wait for God's Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead -- Jesus, who saves us from the coming wrath.**" (I Thess. 1:10)

And it's not just JESUS and PAUL. John speaks of it in even more graphic terms, when he speaks of Jesus on that day, "treading the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty" (Rev. 19:15).

You can't get language that's much more graphic or frightening than that!

And why does the Bible repeatedly warn us of God's wrath? Because its REAL and the word SALVATION makes no sense apart from it. In fact, he warns us of its reality so frequently because it's one of the things the Holy Spirit uses to prompt people to seek after salvation.

There are some people (and I was one of them) who are so complacent / and their conscience so callous / and their will so resistant / and their hearts so caught up in and satisfied with sin -- they're so numb to any invitation to partake of God's love -- that they can't hear the Gospel and would never come to Christ unless they were driven there by the sheer terror of the prospect of

dying in their sin / and rising on the last day to spend all eternity experiencing God's wrath against their sin in hell.

And LISTEN: It is true (as John Piper points out) that, ***"You cannot frighten anyone into heaven. Because heaven is for people who love purity, not simply for people who loathe pain."***

Yet, as he also goes on to point out, ***"good preaching will deliver biblical messages of warning to congregations of saints."*** For we can never discount the possibility, that seated among the saints sits a lost sinner who needs to be awakened to the danger they are in by hearing God's warnings of judgment to come upon all who refuse to believe and obey the Gospel.

"But many people won't come to church if you preach about judgment," say some pastors. / *"I have people who will leave the church if I preach about hell and God's wrath against sin,"* say others. / And thus to keep them from leaving they rip out the heart of the gospel and in doing so leave people to think (as so many in our day do) that the "options" are going to heaven / or simply ceasing to exist at death / eternal life or simply this life.

My friends, if people threaten to leave the church because hell and judgment are preached as being true, then with great sadness, and with great concern for their souls, we must let them leave. Because compromising the truth of the Gospel, and such an instrumental part of the message of salvation, is simply NOT an option for people who believe the Gospel.

We have a divine commission to warn people of the ***GREAT DANGER THEY ARE IN*** so long as they remain outside of the grace, protection and deliverance God offers to them in Christ! In fact, we need to warn them of the wrath they have been under and will remain under until that future Day, if they refuse to come to faith in Christ.

For as the apostle John tells us in John 3:18 and 36: ***"Whoever believes in [Jesus] is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only***

Son... Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for the wrath of God remains upon him."

You see, every unbelieving person has what we could call "a black storm cloud of God's wrath" hovering over them. A storm cloud that will remain there, to break upon them on the Day of God's wrath if they do not flee to find refuge in Christ.

A storm cloud that will actually dissipate and disappear completely the moment they come to faith in Him. That's the essence of the Christian Gospel.

For "***salvation,***" as one man says, "***includes every divine undertaking for the believer, from his deliverance out of the lost estate, to his final presentation in glory, when he will be conformed to the image of Christ.***"

That's what salvation is. Which is why it would be better **NOT** to ask people if they **ARE SAVED**, but to ask them if they **HAVE BEEN SAVED FROM:**

- 1.) the power of sin
- 2.) the penalty of sin
- 3.) the consequences that their sin and bad choices have wreaked in their life and
- 4.) if they are being saved or salvaged and restored by God.

Which means: ***It is impossible to speak of salvation in the biblical sense of the word without addressing or confronting the issue of sin.***

Because biblically speaking, "salvation" is being saved from the power / and penalty / and consequences / and repercussions of our sin.

AND LISTEN: All you need do to receive such a precious gift, is repent of your sin and trust in Jesus Christ to save you.

Have YOU been "saved"?